

Raising Kids Around Guns Michael Martin for USCCA, 2014

It's Never too Early to Begin Gun Safety Education

When it comes to kids and guns, you have two choices: Ignorance or education. But here's the reality—if you take the ignorance approach, your kids will get their firearms “education” from movies, video games, or, from their friends. While I'm not advocating taking your toddler out shooting at the range(...), I *am* advocating that you answer your children's questions about your firearms, and allow them to interact at a level that's safe for their age group. Regardless of how old your child is, you'll need to begin his or her education with an understanding of basic firearms safety. (...)

2—6 Years Old

At this age, it's time to introduce your child to “Eddie Eagle” from the NRA, who teaches kids that if they see a firearm in an unsupervised situation, they should “STOP. Don't Touch. Leave the Area. Tell an Adult.” (...)

While anti-gun groups might claim that the Eddie Eagle program is designed to indoctrinate children into a “gun culture,” that's simply not the case. Instead, its sole mission is child safety, without stating an opinion one way or another, on whether guns are good or bad. (...) In my household, we remind our two young sons that if it *looks* like a gun, the four Eddie Eagle rules apply, regardless of whether they *believe* it's a toy gun. (...) Teaching your child to abide by these rules is as much about *bravery*, as it is about gun safety.

7—12 Years Old

Depending upon your child's maturity and his or her ability to grasp all four Universal Safety Rules, as well as his or her *physical* ability to handle a firearm safely, this age group is ready to shoot a BB gun (or a .22 caliber rifle when they're at the upper end of this age group) under your close supervision. Make these sessions about abiding by the Universal Safety Rules and enjoyment, rather than treating it as a scored event. (...) At the first hint of fatigue, or enjoyment turning into boredom, end the session for the day. Praise your child's accuracy, but even more so, praise them for the great job they did in adhering to the Universal Safety Rules, and review any time they *failed* to follow them.

13+ Years Old

Teenagers who have demonstrated maturity and rock solid safety when using a BB gun and .22 rifle, may be ready to step up to learning how to operate a handgun. With their shorter barrels, handguns can sometimes reintroduce muzzle control problems, so watch closely to ensure that all safety rules are being maintained. So how will you know if your lessons are sinking in? In our house, we recently had a good indication on the success of our lessons when our four-year-old told one of his friends, “Watch your muzzle!” as they were running around the house shooting their dart guns at everything in sight. Remember, as with all things in life, your children will learn more by watching what you *do*, rather than listening to what you *say*. Be a good teacher.

Explaining Home Defense to your Kids

No parent likes talking with their children about the evils that exist in the world, including discussing child abductions, school shootings, “stranger danger,” etc. That same unease extends to discussing what to do in the event of a home invasion. In my home, the discussion gave our oldest son nightmares for a week, but it's a conversation that had to happen, and *continues* to happen on a reoccurring basis, no differently than annual reviews of our fire escape plan or plan in case of a tornado. In fact, relating the idea of a home invasion plan to *other* emergency plans that have already been discussed might be the easiest way to ease into the conversation.

When discussing a home invasion plan with the family, we'd suggest planning a route for all family members to head to the most secure area of the home, and include in the plan who will get the phone and dial 911, who will access the defensive firearm, and who will assist loved ones. You can include older children as active participants in the plan by assigning them with simple tasks(...) « your job is to get out of the house, get to a neighbor, and have him or her call 911. Then your job is done.”

Finally, it's important to discuss with your children what *not* to do in the event of a home invasion. For example, if everyone in the family is in the same part of the house, then it is not necessary, prudent, or smart to go looking for the intruder. With older children, it's extremely important to discuss what to do if a family member is coming home late or unexpectedly, and how to communicate it if a guest will be in the home. The use of a family “code word” or “challenge and reply” can avoid tragedy if your teenage son or daughter has decided to sneak a significant other into the house for a late night rendezvous.

As I said at the beginning of this article, you can educate your kids about firearms or you can trust their education to unreliable and questionable sources. Taking the opportunity to set the tone for your kids related to firearms and personal defense will not only keep them away from forming dangerous perceptions and practices, but it will also bring you closer together as a family.